

## Cancer-Related Fatigue

### What is cancer-related fatigue?

Cancer-related fatigue is a common feeling for cancer patients. It is not the same as the fatigue caused by the demands of daily living. It can feel more severe. It can keep you from enjoying life and your daily routine. Patients have described it as:

- Feeling tired
- Feeling exhausted
- Feeling worn out
- Heaviness in their body
- Feeling slow
- Having trouble concentrating
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling moody
- Feeling sad

### What causes cancer-related fatigue?

The exact cause is unknown. Some of things that might lead to feeling fatigued are:

- The cancer itself
- Medicines, such as chemotherapy
- Radiation therapy
- Low blood counts
- Poor nutrition
- Sleep problems
- Depression, fear, worry or anxiety
- Lack of activity

### How can I manage my cancer-related fatigue?

Talk to your provider about your fatigue. They can help you find ways to make you feel better.

**Eat and drink.** Eating and drinking enough will also help you feel less fatigued. We know that your disease and treatment may make it hard to eat and drink enough. Try eating many small meals and taking sips of fluids throughout the day rather than eating a few larger meals each day. Ask your

provider if you can talk to a dietician. They can suggest ways to help you get enough to eat and drink enough.

**Be active.** We know that exercise can help you feel less tired and improve your sleep. It can also improve your mood. Try going for a short walk. Plan to be active when you have the most energy. Ask your provider how much exercise is best for you.

**Don't do too much.** You may not have enough energy to do everything you want to do in a day. While you have energy, do the things you want to do and ask someone to help you with the others (such as, cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking meals). Know your limits and don't be too hard on yourself.

**Rest and relax.** Save energy and only do the things that need to do. If you feel tired and want to take a nap, you should limit your nap to 10-15 minutes. Longer naps can make it hard to sleep at night. Relaxation methods may allow your body to rest while helping to decrease your stress. Try meditation, prayer, guided imagery, or visualization to relax.

**Sleep at night.** Some people have trouble sleeping. Have good sleep habits. Go to bed at the same time each night, limit naps and caffeine, be active during the day, limit screen time such as a smartphone, computer or tv use right before bed, and use your bed only for sleeping.

**Find support.** Cognitive therapy, relaxation, counseling, support groups, social groups, keeping a journal, hypnosis, and biofeedback may help you manage your

fatigue. Talk with your provider if you want to learn more.

**Take medicines.** Medicines may help ease fatigue. This may not be an option for all. Your provider will let you know if there is a medicine that may help you.

#### References

1. National Comprehensive Cancer Network Guidelines (2023). *Cancer-Related Fatigue* Retrieved from
2. National Cancer Institute (2018). *Support for People with Cancer: Chemotherapy and You.*
3. Oncology Nursing Society (2017). *Fatigue Symptom Interventions and Guidelines.*

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#4384.